New Roadside Grass Marketed

Seed for RoadCrest, a crested wheatgrass developed cooperatively by ARS and scientists at Utah State University, recently went on sale for the first time. RoadCrest was designed for planting along roadsides and highways, at summer cabins, in roughs on golf courses, or at similar sites in the West. It is also well suited for revegetating sites disturbed by mining, construction, or wildfire.

RoadCrest greens up earlier in spring than some of the other wheatgrasses tested. Like other cool-season grasses, it becomes dormant and brown in midsummer but greens up again in late summer and fall. Its comparatively short stature means it may need mowing only once or twice a summer. Tolerant of cold and drought, RoadCrest should thrive in regions of the Intermountain and Great Plains states that have mild summer temperatures and receive about 10 to 20 inches of precipitation a year. Small quantities of seed are now being marketed by the trio of western companies that hold licenses to sell it: Wheatland Seed, Inc., Brigham City, Utah; Bruce Seed Farm, Inc., Townsend, Montana; and Round Butte Seed Growers, Inc., Culver, Oregon. *Kay H. Asay, USDA-ARS Forage and Range Research Unit, Logan, Utah; phone (435) 797-3069, e-mail khasay@cc.usu.edu.*

Restoring Burned Nevada Range

An emergency rehabilitation team working to revegetate some of the 1.6 million western acres that burned last summer includes ARS rangeland experts. With more than 50 years of researching the delicate, high-risk process of revegetating semi-desert rangelands, the scientists are helping the interagency team decide where to reseed and which plants to use.

They are working on ways to keep a fire-feeding weed called cheatgrass from getting a stranglehold. Summer lightning typically starts fires on Nevada rangeland. Fire spreads fast where cheatgrass proliferates, and the cheatgrass returns afterward, before most other plants. But if the site is seeded with perennial grasses soon after the rangeland burns for the first time, rehabilitation has a chance; otherwise, cheatgrass reestablishes and becomes increasingly difficult to control. Public land managers will use specialized equipment designed for rocky, semi-desert soils to plant 5 million pounds of a seed mix that includes native shrubs and grasses, as well as HyCrest, an ARS-developed crested wheatgrass. *James A. Young, USDA-ARS Exotic and Invasive Weeds Research Unit, Reno, Nevada; phone (775) 784-6057, e-mail jayoung@scs.unr.edu.*

History Buff's Guide to U.S. Farming

More than 200 years of U.S. farming history can now be easily accessed online. A U.S. Department of Agriculture History Collection web site has been produced by the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland, as a cooperative project with the University of Maryland. The collection dates to USDA's creation in 1862—and before. It includes original letters, reports, and other papers of USDA officials and agricultural historians, along with additional materials gathered by the department over its nearly 140-year history. Some manuscripts date back to the late 18th century. While the immediate goal was to preserve the collection, NAL also created cataloging records for the materials, took steps to protect deteriorating materials, and reorganized the collection into a more user-friendly format. The 660 linear feet of records are now housed in acid-free archival folders and cartons, and more than 8,000 books and journals have been cataloged and added to the NAL collection. Brought together over several decades by USDA agencies, the materials also include photographs and videotapes.

To visit the new web site, go to http://www.nal.usda.gov/speccoll/collect/history/index.htm. There, you will find a searchable guide to the collection, a map to help navigate the site, highlights of the collection, and historical photo images and graphics. *Susan H. Fugate, NAL Special Collections Section, Beltsville, Maryland; phone (301) 504-5876, e-mail sfugate@nal.usda.gov.*

Latex From Desert Shrub Blocks Viruses, Bacteria

Preliminary tests show that surgical gloves, condoms, or other products made from the natural rubber latex of a southwestern desert shrub called guayule are an effective barrier against disease-causing bacteria and viruses. The tests provide new evidence that medical, home, and industrial products made from guayule latex may offer a safe, practical alternative for the estimated 20 million Americans allergic to latex products—usually made from the Brazilian rubber tree. In 1994, ARS scientists were the first to show that guayule latex is free of the allergens that can cause severe reactions in latex-sensitive people.

Now, an ARS and an FDA researcher report that prototype patient-exam gloves and condoms made of guayule latex have passed standard virus-permeability tests. In those tests, a specially chosen virus was unable to slip through the latex barriers. The virus is smaller than bacteria and the same size or smaller than human disease-causing viruses such as HIV, hepatitis B, and herpes simplex. The prototype gloves and condoms used for the tests were made of latex from Arizona-grown guayule. They were the same thickness as commercially produced gloves and condoms made of natural latex from the Brazilian rubber tree. *Katrina Cornish, USDA-ARS Crop Improvement and Utilization Research Unit, Albany, California; phone (510) 559-5950, e-mail kcornish@pw.usda.gov.*